White Paper

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University of Kansas (KU)
NEH Humanities PhD Planning Grant
Next Generation Humanities PhD Program
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White Paper

What Happened?

The planning grant activities began with a meeting of the steering committee in August of 2016. Composed of the PIs, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and our five working group chairs, the steering committee determined at this initial meeting the compensation of the working group chairs, the charge of the chairs over the term of the planning grant, reviewed the planning grant timeline, and determined and convened the working group members. Following this initial meeting, the five working groups[1] were charged with meeting twice during September and October to discuss their working group themes. The PIs and the steering committee charged the working groups with meeting three main objectives

·   determine the current status of their theme area at KU;
·   gather information on innovations in their theme area at other institutions both within the humanities and in disciplines outside the humanities;
·   and identify specific and actionable recommendations, as well as more aspirational recommendations, for projects or initiatives that will serve to transform humanities doctoral education at KU and better position humanities PhD graduates for a range of careers both within and beyond the academy.

The purpose for the objectives was to provide some guidance to the groups and to give the working group final reports some symmetry and consistency.

Following these first two working group meetings, the steering committee met again in November 2016. This meeting provided a forum where the PIs were able to receive feedback from the working group chairs on the progress of their working groups, identify what potential impediments working groups were experiencing in order to determine what resources could be deployed to assist the chairs, and discuss the next steps for working groups through the second half of the planning grant. During this meeting, the group also discussed potential speakers that the various working groups would like to invite or potential peer institutions that would be of interest for a site visit.

The working groups continued to research and gather information on the charges outlined in September throughout December and January. In January, the co-PIs and the College's graduate professional development coordinator developed a faculty survey at the request of the working groups in order to gage the interest of the KU humanities faculty on doctoral reform within the five working group themes, as well as their awareness of any initiatives on doctoral reform happening already at KU. The results of the survey were presented

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[1] The five working groups were tasked with each investigating one of the following themes: Doctoral Curriculum, Engaged Scholarship, Recruitment and Admissions, Alumni Engagement, and Employer Connections

at a meeting of the entire planning grant committee in February 2017. At the all-group meeting, members were debriefed about the Project Director's meeting held in Washington DC, members were given the opportunity to share the highlights and challenges of their working groups' activities, and members were provided information of upcoming events and visiting speakers. It was determined during this meeting, based on the feedback from the faculty survey, that it would be beneficial to hold focus groups with graduate students regarding their views on graduate education and the potential for doctoral education reform. The group felt that focus groups, where students could speak freely on topics of their choosing, would reveal more useful information than a blanket survey to all graduate students. Focus groups were held on April 17th and 18th with doctoral students at various career stages from the departments of History, Spanish and Portuguese, French and Italian, and English.

Following the all-group meeting in February, working groups were charged with meeting three times before May in order to finalize their research and begin working on their reports to the PIs. During this time, at the invitation of the Next Gen steering committee, Dr. Maren Wood visited KU and gave a public keynote presentation regarding the academic and non-academic job market for humanities PhDs, held a workshop on transferable skills for graduate students, and gave a brownbag presentation to our committee members as part of the Planning Grant. Her brownbag and public presentation presented for faculty a model of how to speak with their students honestly about the current academic job market, supported by data, so that students have a better understanding of a market they may be navigating in their near future. The hands-on, interactive transferrable skills workshop for graduate students provided a forum for students to practice translating their academic skills and expertise into tailored, employer-specific language for a variety of job opportunities. Students left the workshop feeling that their academic training has prepared them well for careers beyond the academy, a welcome message that focused on what students already know, instead of what students still need to learn to be viable job candidates.

The working groups finalized their reports throughout May and presented their final reports to the PIs on June 1. From June 20-24, one of the co-PIs, the College's graduate professional development coordinator, and the chair of the employer relations working group conducted a site visit to UC Davis and Stanford to learn more about the activities and innovations at these two campuses around PhD career diversity. At UC Davis, they met with staff from the UC Davis Humanities Institute, the coordinator of the Mellon Public Scholars Program, graduate student alumni of the Mellon Public Scholars Program, and staff from the Internship and Career Center. At Stanford, they met with graduate student-focused staff at BEAM (Stanford's career education center), staff dedicated to humanities initiatives and digital humanities, and the Associate Vice Provost for Graduate Education. These visits generated ideas about increasing career support for PhD students, incorporating public scholarship and digital humanities into the graduate school experience, and providing comprehensive, competencies-based centralized professional development programming aimed at graduate students. At the same time, all parties involved brainstormed ways to best engage faculty and reluctant graduate students in discussions about career diversity for humanities PhDs.

What Worked and What Didn't?
2-3 pages What Worked and What Didn't? Give a detailed account of major accomplishments and report on what was stellar and what might have been approached or structured differently if your institution were to begin again. What did you wish you had known when starting the project? What advice would you give to future grantees?

There were a number of accomplishments and successful outcomes from our planning grant. The most significant of these accomplishments is the success rate for the faculty survey, followed by the quality of feedback we received from two focus groups we held with graduate students.

With a response rate of 35% of our humanities faculty from doctoral granting departments, the survey revealed a great deal about what areas our faculty are most open to reforming, and what areas they are least supportive of reforming. The survey itself included general questions about doctoral reform, i.e. the need for reform; understanding of the current state of the job market; and knowledge of efforts and activities in career diversity at the level of national associations (MLA, AHA). Following these more general questions that were used to establish a baseline of knowledge, we included more specific questions regarding reform efforts in line with the five themes of our working groups. The results of the survey indicated that faculty were most supportive of integration of professional development modules in existing coursework, involving alumni in the mentoring of students, and exploring enhancing the opportunities for graduate students to explore community engaged projects. While open to some modification to the curriculum to include professional development modules, there was some resistance to substantial curricular reform out of concern for maintaining the academic rigor of the current curriculum and program. The response rate for the faculty survey and the general openness to many of the reform areas indicates that our faculty are open to some level of reform, the open ended questions indicated a general reluctance to allocate time and resources to these efforts as faculty generally feel overwhelmed and are resistant to allocating staff time to alumni tracking endeavors, as staff time is also at a premium.

The results of the student focus groups indicated that students are very open to reform. Of the five working group themes, the areas in which graduate students were most excited about or open to reform is greater flexibility in their curriculum and increased engagement with graduate alumni in careers outside of the tenure track. Not only were graduate students most vocal about their desire for increased interactions with these alumni, but they requested interaction with graduate alumni outside of their home departments and disciplines. Regarding curricular flexibility, beyond curricular reform within their home departments, students indicated that they would like to have greater flexibility in taking courses outside of their home department but related to their dissertation topic to lend greater interdisciplinarity to their graduate training.

Other major accomplishments of the planning grant include one of the most well-attended graduate workshops of the 2016-17 academic year led by our invited speaker Dr. Maren Wood, PhD career coach and founder of Beyond Prof. Over 60 students registered for the event on identifying transferable skills and translating those skills into employer specific language. Many students stayed after the workshop and spoke to Dr. Wood regarding other resources and tips. Our feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive and included

requests for similar workshops in the future. Dr. Wood also gave a well-attended keynote on the current state of the academic job market and a brownbag presentation on her research into the academic job market and other trends to our planning grant members.

Finally, at the conclusion of the planning grant, we received over 30 pages of original research from our working groups on the state their theme at KU and recent innovations or successful programs at other institutions, both peer and aspirational peers. Each group also provided recommendations of projects or initiatives related to PhD program reform at three different levels: recommendations that are smaller scale, low cost, and more easily achievable; recommendations that would require more resources and buy-in before implementation; and bolder, large scale recommendations that probably could not be implemented in the near future.

Looking back on our planning grant year, there are several elements that we would approach differently. First, we would create more opportunities for communication and interaction among the working groups, instead of a model that led to working groups conducting their planning grant activities in silos. As a lack of communication between working groups was evident early on in the planning grant, the PIs determined that the new graduate professional development coordinator for the College would become a liaison among the groups and between the groups and PIs. She was responsible for tracking each group's progress, sharing working group outcomes with the other working groups, and preventing the duplication of effort. Second, we would hold more frequent debriefing sessions with the steering committee to assist with directing the activities of the working groups. This would provide more opportunities for working group chairs to discuss their group activities and progress and to answer any questions or address issues the chairs may have. Finally, if we were to start this planning grant again, we might consider focusing on two or three specific humanities departments rather than all seven of our PhD granting humanities departments, as the needs, conditions, and characteristics of each department differ significantly. Inclusion of all departments, regardless of their prior experiences with PhD reform or readiness to undertake reform, made it difficult to ascertain which initiatives were the most implementable or potentially the most impactful.

What does it All Mean?
3-4 pages What Does It All Mean? Include reflections on the impact the project had on campus for graduate students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, external partners, and more. How have this year's experiences defined or altered your thinking about the problems facing doctoral education in the humanities across the country?

The activities of this grant have highlighted a number of areas where we have a tremendous amount of potential to do impactful work. We have also realized throughout this grant that we have some challenges ahead of us, though manageable challenges. Our campus is quite decentralized. Many times this works to our advantage. In order to enact meaningful doctoral program reform, we are now aware of the need for structural development and clear lines of communication across campus to overcome decentralization, including between individual faculty members within departments, between departments, centers, and institutes, and finally between offices at the upper administration level. For instance, our working groups identified complementary and sometimes even similar graduate student development programs

offered by different units who were not collaborating on their efforts. At the same time, faculty and students in departments often remained unaware of campus offerings that would benefit students' ability to think about a range of careers while still pursuing a PhD. At KU, graduate school recruitment and admissions, as well as curriculum, is handled by individual departments. This means that there is no centralized office offering support for doctoral program reform, or that serves as a clearinghouse for what initiatives departments have adopted. One main challenge to overcome is this decentralization so that innovations in doctoral curriculum can be undertaken, shared, and supported at the institutional level.

Reflecting on our grant, we recognize that we have a challenge of addressing the divergence between faculty and graduate students when it comes to areas of interest regarding doctoral program reform. In general, our humanities faculty are more open to reform in the areas of supporting engaged scholarship, thinking through our recruitment strategies, and providing more applied/public humanities fellowships during the summer for graduate students. Faculty were less willing to substantially reform curricular requirements, due to a concern with decreasing rigor and student exposure to important works in the field. Graduate students, in general, feel more strongly regarding substantial reform in terms of their required curriculum. Many students wanted more pedagogical training, increased exposure to professional development activities in their coursework, more flexibility in taking courses outside of their home departments, and the possibility of alternative dissertation formats. Graduate students were also very vocal about their desire for substantial and sustained contact with graduate alumni both within their home department and those in other humanities and social science departments at KU.

Regarding the impact of this planning grant on our understanding of the problems facing doctoral education in the humanities across the country, we were interested to discover that what we have experienced at our institution is similar to that of other institutions. Attaining large-scale faculty buy-in has been noticeably difficult across all of the institutions we interacted with, both at the meeting in Washington D.C. in January and our recent site visits. While we have all been successful in finding faculty champions, even those faculty who are strident supporters of doctoral reform feel overburdened and ill-equipped to enact change with the current level of departmental and university resources. Many institutions also share our decentralized model, and those decentralized institutions with which we interacted shared our struggles with this organizational model when it comes to enacting overarching reform.

We have also gained a greater understanding of the importance of recognizing and adapting to different departmental cultures. Some humanities departments at KU openly embrace the need for preparing students for a variety of career outcomes and have already undertaken structural reforms to this end. Others are less open to the need for reform, or, even if the idea of reform is attractive, they currently lack the resources to enact changes to their graduate programs. Certain disciplines, such as Art History, already have a strong track record of students obtaining non-tenure track jobs, since many go into curatorial, appraisal, and auction work as a natural outgrowth of their academic field, with little need for additional training to obtain these careers. These disciplines are less concerned with actively enacting new doctoral program reforms. KU's English department has, in response to acknowledging the difficulties of the tenure track market and the increasing desire of students to pursue a variety of careers,

designated a "job placement officer" to assist students with professional development and career aspirations. The Spanish and Portuguese department has relatively high placement rates of their students in tenure track careers, so that department wants to bolster its ability to continue to place students at this level. While each of these departments can benefit from doctoral program reform, reform efforts will need to be individualized to best benefit the needs and strengths of those departments. We never assumed there would be a silver bullet or a one-size fits all solution to the doctoral education reform in the humanities, but we have gained a greater appreciation for the need to think through targeted and tailored approaches to each of our departments, developed in partnership with our faculty.

A final issue we found that most institutions face is that the majority of graduate students enter their doctoral programs with the intention of pursuing a career as a tenure track faculty member and maintain this focus throughout their graduate career. It strikes us as imperative that we expose graduate students to the various rewarding career paths open to them early in their graduate careers, develop stronger relationships between departments and their graduate alumni, and make a focused effort to fully support our graduates in their quest for a tenure track career while simultaneously equipping them with the tools to succeed in a variety of career paths.

Perhaps the most important impact of this planning grant at our institution is that it has generated conversations on campus between faculty members, administrators, graduate students, and staff that have previously been missing or irregular in frequency. Having these conversations more regularly and out in the open has led to more graduate students feeling comfortable discussing career diversity with faculty and staff. These conversations have also led to the early development of partnerships between many departments and units on campus that touch on various aspects of graduate education, training, and support in line with a more consistent and thoughtful approach to how we support our graduate students for a variety of career paths. For example, the College Office of Graduate Affairs is currently working closely with our University Career Center to develop podcasts for our students on career development, covering topics such as online presence, CV to resume preparation, and informational interviewing/networking. The Commons, the Hall Center for the Humanities, and the College Office of Graduate Affairs have presented and are continuing to develop a suite of graduate student workshops focused on skills that are valuable in a variety of career paths, including public communication, grant writing, and social media best practices. The challenge before us is to maintain and increase the level of conversation around this topic, creating more spaces for these discussions for flourish. Another challenge is that the programs and training offered by these units remain extra-curricular. Graduate students participate in these programs on their own time and without any kind of credit towards their degrees. One goal would be to work with departments to embed some of this training into the doctoral program so that students do not have to rely so heavily on programming offered by non-departmental units, programming often divorced from their degree-seeking work, but can receive important training both within and outside of their departments.

What's Next?
1-2 pages What's Next? Tell us how you plan to continue your project and report on how you are disseminating your experiences beyond white paper

As mentioned above, each of the five working groups submitted final reports to the steering committee, detailing each group's findings and recommendations. The groups were asked to make recommendations at three levels: recommendations that are smaller scale, low cost, and more easily achievable; recommendations that would require more resources and buy-in before implementation; and bolder, large scale recommendations that probably could not be implemented in the near future. This last category of recommendations, while not necessarily achievable, would give the steering committee an idea of what working groups would like to see if real-world constraints did not exist. The first two categories of recommendations would be the basis for how the steering committee proposes to move forward with the work achieved during the Planning Grant process.

Most recommendations made by the working groups centered on initiatives already underway at KU, initiatives that already have visibility on campus and the support of faculty and students. Many of these initiatives would need to be scaled up, more widely broadcast, and work in collaboration with other units/programs on campus. For example, the Hall Center for the Humanities' Applied Humanities programs, including a Bootcamp and an Applied Humanities Fellows program, was acknowledged by almost every working group. However, because these programs are still in a pilot stage, they are relatively small. Bootcamp accommodates 12 students each year, and the Fellows program can fund between 6-8 students every summer. Working groups recommended that these programs be expanded in size so that their impact is greater. This is a goal of the Hall Center, and establishing partnerships with other units on campus, such as the Center for Service Learning, might allow for expansion of these programs. The Hall Center also offers a grant to faculty to fund an engaged scholarship project, where a faculty member works with a community partner on a piece of research. Graduate students are currently not involved in this program, but the Center has discussed altering this program to feature graduate students and faculty working together on a public engagement project, along the model of UC Davis's Mellon Public Scholars program. The Center for Service Learning, which is currently mostly focused on providing community learning experiences for undergraduates, could partner with humanities programs to offer graduate students the opportunity to work alongside and mentor undergraduates who are researching in the community.

On the topic of PhD alumni engagement, KU is already planning on rolling out a new platform, PeopleGrove, which will allow alumni to create robust profiles. These profiles can be searched by faculty and current students. This platform will make tracking and connecting with alumni easier and more systematic. The adoption of this platform, currently set for Fall 2017, will make it much less labor intensive for departments to acquire the information necessary to tell the stories of PhD alumni, especially those who end up working outside of the professoriate. The consequences of this platform are vast: departments can highlight alumni on websites, easily tabulate placement data, contact alumni for speaking engagements, mentoring expertise,

or even the creation of departmental or College-wide alumni advisory boards. One of the main barriers to alumni engagement at KU is the amount of time it takes to track alumni and to keep information about employment up to date. PeopleGrove will make this task less onerous, and hopefully will make departments more open to creative engagement with alumni that will benefit current students.

There were several recommendations made that would involve more resources and buy-in than currently exist at KU but that could be achievable within the next few years. The key to implementing any of these recommendations would be to focus on individual departments and campus-wide offices that would be open to partnering to pilot these initiatives. The first recommendation along these lines would be to implement the concept of "holistic" review when designing the PhD program application process and when reviewing applications. Holistic review deemphasizes traditional quantitative measures used to initially screen applicants, such as standardized test scores or undergraduate GPA, and instead asks for information that gives a committee the sense of a whole individual, and that individual's potential to succeed throughout a PhD program. This would involve educating faculty on new screening practices and assisting departments with reconceptualizing the application form and process. In addition, all faculty in the department would have a role in screening applications, not just a committee drawn from the entire faculty body. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Office of Graduate Studies at KU would have to work closely with departments to determine which would be the best pilots for this admissions process, and would need to provide resources to assist with education and implementation of best practices. However, the outcome could be a more diverse applicant pool with a more well-rounded set of skills being accepted into humanities doctoral programs.

A second recommendation was to host an annual humanities PhD alumni conference, emphasizing those alumni who have attained careers beyond the tenure track. This conference would be an opportunity for departments to highlight and reconnect with alumni, and for current students to network with successful alumni and learn about the wide variety of careers available to a humanities PhD and how to best prepare oneself for a variety of careers. Stanford University's PhD Pathways conference would be a model for such an event. A key takeaway from the site visit to Stanford was that while the conference is designed for students to engage with alumni, the involvement of faculty is key in order to start cultivating faculty buy-in regarding exposing students to career diversity and faculty awareness of successful alumni career trajectories. Thus, we would incorporate faculty into the conference by having them serve as keynotes or moderate panels as appropriate. The need for extensive staff time to organize such a conference, for funding to provide refreshments, travel assistance to presenters, etc. and for cultivating some level of faculty buy-in, means that this is a mid-range goal and not something immediately implementable.

The less realistic, fantasy goals of each of the working groups tended to be recommendations regarding large scale curricular change. One group put together a proposal for a Public Humanities certificate, which could serve as a minor field for PhD students. Such a certificate would include courses in grant writing, digital humanities, best practices for public scholarship, etc. This would require the creation of many new courses, as well as working with departments to ensure that these classes could realistically fit into the curriculum credits

required for graduate students. Several groups recommended a dual-track (scholarly + professional school) PhD or a Public Scholarship PhD that a student not interested in a faculty career could choose after successfully completing comps. These are not recommendations that we are ready to move forward with at this time. However, what such recommendations demonstrate to the steering committee is that, freed from the constraints of practicality, faculty do tend towards recommending large-scale curricular initiatives. At the same time, though, faculty are less open to the idea of making the changes that are necessary in order to successfully integrate large scale curricular change into departments, such as evaluating course hour requirements, evaluating traditional structures of the degree (major field/minor fields, for example), or the development of acceptable alternative dissertation formats. What this means is that time must be spent helping departments evolve their culture to one where the doctoral curriculum is more open, without sacrificing rigor. One next step to get us eventually to this point is to explore ways to successfully bridge the divergence that seems to exist between faculty and students when it comes to doctoral program reform areas of emphasis.